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SUBJECT: IRAQ'S HANDLING OF THE CURFEW AT THE BAGHDAD AIRPORT

[¶1](#). SUMMARY: Following the recent al-Askiri Mosque bombing, the Government of Iraq imposed a curfew. Curfews, of course, have complex consequences. The GoI's successful handling of the curfew in regard to passenger traffic at the Baghdad International Airport showed its increased abilities to plan and to execute its plans. END SUMMARY.

Al-Askiri Mosque Bombing

[¶2](#). On June 13 one of the holiest sites in Shi'a Islam, the al-Askari Mosque, was bombed for a second time in two years. On the day of the bombing, an indefinite curfew was placed on Samarra by the Iraqi police. Beginning at 3 p.m. of the same day, a curfew was also placed on vehicle traffic and large gatherings in Baghdad. The Baghdad curfew had originally been set to expire on Saturday, June 16, 2007. It was lifted, however, at 5 a.m. on Sunday, June 17th.

Iraqi's Respond to Curfew

[¶3](#). During the three-day curfew airport managers at Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) faced a problem that even major world airports have found difficult: What do you do when a large group of people are stranded at your airport?

[¶4](#). Due to the ban on most vehicular traffic, anyone arriving at BIAP who didn't have access to either a PSD or a helicopter ride was essentially stranded. Under the direction of BIAP Director Mr. Khaldoon, the Iraqi airport staff took charge. First, they notified all airlines with incoming flights to immediately stop bringing in non-Coalition passengers. Next, they notified all staff members to be prepared to work longer shifts in order to cover for their coworkers who were trapped at home by the curfew. They then converted office space into sleeping quarters so that airport workers would have a place to rest between their extended shifts.

[¶5](#). Even after the number of incoming Iraqi passengers had been reduced to a minimum, there were still several hundred people stranded in the main terminal. Airport staff arranged for food to be served from the Airport Cafe and they placed cases of bottled water around the terminal. Passengers were allowed to place blankets and other covers on the floor in an effort to make themselves as comfortable as possible. Despite the cramped quarters and difficult situation, most people were in good spirits. People were seen sharing their portable DVD players with their new-found neighbors, giving the impression of several small movie theaters scattered about the terminal. The airport convenience store reportedly gave out candy and soft drinks to the many children who had unexpectedly become airport residents. Airport staff also contacted representatives of the US Embassy's Transportation Attache's Office to advise them that additional food and water might be required in the days to come.

[¶6](#). As it turned out, the extra supplies weren't needed. The airport staff made arrangements with the Prime Minister's office to obtain a waiver from the curfew. They then arranged for the Iraqi National

Police and the Iraqi military to provide security for several buses to transport passengers to pre-arranged points around Baghdad (they used police stations). From there, Iraqi police personnel drove the passengers to their homes. The reverse evacuation took approximately 36 hours to complete, but in the end, virtually everyone made it home.

Iraq's Airports

¶7. From May 2005 to May 2006, the monthly average for civilian take-offs and landings was 1,537. From May 2006 to May 2007, the monthly average for civilian take-offs and landings was 2,734. This represents a 78 percent increase in the average-number of civilian flight activity from one twelve-month period to the next. The good news is that much of this traffic is controlled by Iraqi controllers at four of the civilian airports - Baghdad, Basrah, Erbil, and Sulaimaniyah. The monthly average for the full 24-month period was 2,135 civilian take-offs and landings.

USG Assistance to Airport Infrastructure

¶8. From 2005 to date, the USG has spent approximately \$32M in IRRF on construction activities at BIAP as well as training of relevant personnel. Major projects include the critical rehabilitation of BIAP facilities from electrical to water and sewer, installation of Visual Aids for aircraft traffic, powering the new radar system, street lighting, bringing BIAP into compliance with international navigational aid standards. The USG also provided Operations and Maintenance training for ICAA personnel using the air traffic control system, flight safety training and certification for Flight

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Safety Inspectors, tools for critical communication redundancy, and Air Traffic Control training and English language training. Moreover, the USG funded and facilitated the Air Navigation Systems Commissioning Flight Inspection, which will allow flights to land and depart from BIAP with less than visual flight conditions.

¶9. Prior to 2005, USAID reportedly spent approximately \$20M in IRRF funds on BIAP infrastructure work including the rehabilitation and modernization of the Air Traffic Control Tower, repair of Terminal C and administration offices, construction of security checkpoint and 240-car parking lot, installation of VSAT communications system and 6.5 megawatt power generators, repair of perimeter security fence, and the restoration of substation transformers and generators.

Comment

¶10. COMMENT: The challenge of dealing with the curfew prompted by an act of terrorism demonstrated some promising outcomes in terms of Iraqi officials taking the lead. Without guidance and with only a small amount of assistance from the USG, Iraqi leadership at BIAP put into place an action plan that rapidly, effectively and efficiently responded to an emergency situation. Apart from crisis management we are also seeing Iraqi's embrace and improve day-to-day management of the airport. The Iraqis are playing the leading role in restoring air travel to Baghdad. END COMMENT.